

Carl Otto book excerpts: Remembering World War II

“I never knew what infantry outfit I was with or exactly where we were, and my service record makes no specific mention of my ever being in the infantry. However, that service record is littered with errors and omissions. We must have had a Clinger as a Company Clerk.

We were in a wooded area and the artillery had and was doing a number on the trees. There were places where it looked like a huge brush hog had been through there. I also don't remember how long I was with the infantry squad; at the very most it could not have been a lot more than ten days I do remember the frozen bodies of mostly German soldiers and the blood-stained snow.

I made one real mistake while with that infantry squad. One night I removed my boots and tried to warm up my feet by rugging them. My toes were frost bitten and with my shoes off my feet began to swell and I could not get my boots back on. Luckily, one of the guys in our squad had an extra pair of boots in his pack and they were two sizes bigger than nine. I got those boots on.

As I rethink that incident, I wonder; why did that guy have an extra pair of boots? Nobody had extra boots. However, I also realize how lucky I was that he did; and that he gave them to me.

I did have frost bitten toes, fingertips, ears, and nose. But some guys froze to death; none in my squad but in other units I was told.

Then one day a guy came up to our Sgt. and talked for a minute. Then the Sgt. said, “Otto, you and Vance go with this guy.” I asked, “Where are we going?” The Sgt. said, “It doesn't make a damn bit of difference; you are out of the infantry.”

Within an hour we were assigned to the 94th Combat Signal Battalion and were back in the same area we had just left. I was assigned to a Squad in Company C under Sgt. Paul Kerbs; Vance went to a different company, and I never saw him again until many years later.

The main thing I remember about the Battle of the Bulge was the bitter cold and the bloody snow and the frozen bodies – everywhere. And that the entire area was littered with destroyed military vehicles; mostly German. And in the days to follow, as the blizzard ended and the temperature began to rise, it was the stench. It was impossible to describe the unique stench of a rotting corpse, and it was also impossible to escape the smell by trying to filter the air; we just had to adjust and live with it.

You can read more about Carl's experiences in his book.